

Preparing Effective Proposals With an Emphasis on Results

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PREPARING EFFECTIVE PROPOSALS

With an Emphasis on Results

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Notes

David Piantanida, EPA OECA

He gave this presentation last year, but did not focus much on outcomes. This year, they have also switched from submitting pre-proposals to full-blown proposals

What I will cover Today

- ♦ Offer suggestions on how to write effective Proposals.
- ♦ Explain Process of how OECA selects Proposals
- ♦ Explain how outcome measurement fit into the grant process
- ♦ Explain the terminology of outcome measurement
- ♦ Identify the characteristics of a Performance-based proposal

Notes

These are general suggestions from his perspective, as someone who's managed this program for a few years. This is a competitive program – he will talk about how they select projects.

EPA has focused on outcome measures since 1999, but he is not sure that all of the grantees have a good handle on what EPA means by this.

Results in Grants

- ♦ **Key Points:**
 - Link grants to OECA's strategic plan (Goal 5)
 - Incorporate outcome measures in grant work plans
 - Improve performance reporting by grantees on results
 - FR Notice must discuss expected outcomes/results
 - Past Performance

Notes

OECA links the funding areas to their Strategic Plans (Goal 5). They need the data for effective enforcement. They want to improve performance reporting by grantees and have them articulate results.

Past performance is key. How have the states done with other grant programs and/or with submitting final reports? How were the deliverables received by the project officer? By 2005/2006, they want to use this as one of the criteria to rate proposals. This is not totally objective, and not everyone has received a past grant.

The Notice

- ♦ Read and Read again and ask questions
- ♦ Become familiar with the sections of the Notice
 - The Eligibility criteria
 - The Funding Area and Criteria
 - Closing date
 - Proposal format and length

Notes

The Federal Register notice is always on the web site – read it and ask questions. You can always call Lucy Reed, the technical contact for FR notices, or David.

Pay attention to the funding areas. The content is essential. Inter state- or governmental organizations have the advantage of being able to work with multiple states. We do get proposals from time to time that simply do not meet the funding area.

Proposal Format

- ♦ Follow the Format in the Notice
 - Project information- summary/abstract
 - Problem Statement
 - Summary project goals
 - Summary work plan – output and outcome measures; how will results be shared?
 - Project milestones
 - Project costs

Notes

The proposal should be in an easy-to-follow format.

Outcomes are more difficult to quantify, but we should have some for every group of outputs. Sharing is also very valuable, and we can work with multi-state organizations to reach groups of states or tribes (through NESCAUM, ITEP, etc)

Funding Areas

- ♦ An Important element in the Notice
 - FY2004 (Permit Compliance System Modernization)
- ♦ Make sure you understand the funding area
 - Review description and criteria
 - Please don't "parrot" back the example in the Notice
 - Only address one funding area per proposal

Notes

*Don't just repeat the language in the FR notice
If there is more than one proposal, then please only address one funding area per proposal.*

Other Tips

- ♦ Get Smarter with Results/Outcomes
 - **The Yellow Book::**
 - <http://www.epa.gov/compliance/resources/policies/planning/results/ca/measuring.pdf>
 - **The Blue Book:** Using Performance Measurement as a Mgmt. Tool.
- ♦ Get familiar with EPA Order on Results in Assistance Agreements – will be available at www.epa.gov/ogd/competition
- ♦ Grant Writing Tutorial
 - <http://www.epa.gov/seahome/grants.html>

Notes

The yellow book is a little more technical and gets into statistical compliance rates, while my office looks for overall outcomes and outputs.

Howard Corcoran talked about the EPA Order; it will help you understand what we're up against. We will distribute it to all of you when it comes out, which we expect to be in September. It is expected to be in force by January 2005.

What do we look for?

- ♦ Well written and specific:
 - Project Focus, problem being address
 - Pick one funding area
 - Project activities are clear, outcome measurement(s), and results can be shared
 - Project Milestones with dates and project costs
 - We look closely at Project Costs (e.g. reasonable)

Notes

The Regions help review proposals. Each region puts together a team of reviewers. They send David the rankings, anecdotal comments, strengths and weaknesses.

During the second phase, David receives the rankings and they whittle the group down to a manageable size, and then brief Mike Stahl (the Office Director), as well as the Deputy Office Director. David selects 2 regional people to be on the HQ team

What we Look for (cont)?

- ♦ Project meets FR Notice criteria
- ♦ Past Performance (i.e., quarterly reports, results/outcomes, timely final report)
- ♦ Regions concur that a Proposal is acceptable

Notes

The Regions must agree that a proposal is acceptable. Their buy-in is critical to success.

What are Outcomes

- ♦ A Positive change in the
 - Knowledge
 - Skills
 - Beliefs or attitudes
 - Behavior
 - Events
- ♦ Outcomes are not what the program/project itself did but the positive consequences of what the program/project did.
- ♦ Outcomes are linked to the program's overall mission – its reason for existing.

Notes

What are we looking for? What is the big picture? What are we trying to accomplish? This is the only way to understand what we mean by outcomes.

Not all outcomes or consequences will be positive – some will be negative.

Outcomes are the picture from 50,000 feet.

Outcome Indicators and Targets

- ♦ Outcome Indicators are observable, quantifiable evidence that the outcome has occurred.
- ♦ Outcome targets are the numeric goals you set for your outcome indicators

Notes

Outcomes must be quantifiable

What is an example of this in the Park Heights project?

One is the number of auto body shops that are using licensed and accredited waste haulers.

Outputs

- ♦ Outputs are products and services delivered
- ♦ Outputs quantify your level of effort and the number of people served.
- ♦ Outputs are what we are accustomed to measuring and reporting.
- ♦ Examples: # of training sessions, # of inspections, # of reports issued

Notes

Outputs are what we're all good at, and they're important. Virgil talked yesterday about the number of people who attended training, or the number of training sessions. But it can't be the only thing. Looking out 2 or 3 years, what can we see as an outcome?

Virgil mentions – people who have gone through the training and have actually done inspections. But what will that do for Indian country? There was a medical waste incinerator that the tribe had difficulty controlling. The tribe decided to pressure them and now they're gone.

David – focus on what is the behavior you are trying to change.

Example – Performance Based Proposal

- ♦ Meet a compelling and demonstrated need
- ♦ Are focused on outcomes, but don't neglect process
- ♦ Propose best practice or innovative activities likely to produce outcomes
- ♦ Have clear and logical targets
- ♦ Have practical methods to measure achievement

Notes

What's the compelling need? How does it help your state? Outputs are still important.

We have many projects that are very innovative in terms of best practices. As you go along with your project, rather than waiting for submission of your final report, we would like the grantee to measure success along the way. And we think your organization would like the same. The quarterly reports do not do it – they look at milestones and outputs.

Summary

- ♦ Well written Proposals that address FR Notice criteria
- ♦ This (STAG) Program will continue to focus on results
- ♦ New Grant Policy:
 - Results and outcomes – demonstrating that we are achieving environmental benefits for the taxpayer.
- ♦ “What gets measured, gets done” (Peter Drucker)

Notes

This program has always focused on results, and there will be more of that in the future.

David hopes to visit the grantees, and currently has a request to visit 4 states

There is a new grant policy that will be distributed as soon as it comes out.

Bottom line – EPA gives out a lot of money and the taxpayer has a right to know about the outcomes of the grants.

Questions and Answers

- ♦ Contact David Piantanida, (202) 564-8318
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Questions & Answers

Q: Have you ever considered doing a survey of the states to ask what their weaknesses or needs are to achieving Goal 5?

A: That is a great idea. We pick focus areas from talking with the Regions and looking at the Strategic Plan. Maybe in a survey we can show what the Regions say and let people react to it.

Q: How do you notify recipients whether or not they got the grant?

A: I do it via e-mail. First I notify the regions, then a day or so later I notify the applicants by e-mail.

Questions & Answers

Q: Do you award all or none?

A: Last year we did that, and cut all by 10%. We awarded projects, but cut their budgets. We don't always do that.

Q: What is the potential for changing gears along the way if you get information that causes you to rethink the direction of the grant?

A: We actually encourage that as long as it is still consistent with the RFP and the main focus remains the same. We understand the need for adjustments, including a longer time horizon. If it requires additional funds, that usually won't be possible.

Questions & Answers

C: Regarding making changes along the way. Each project takes on a life of its own, and you often can't predict what is going to happen.

Q: What happens if the grant is not being conducted as promised or if the grantee is messing things up?

A: HQ relies on the regional Project Officers to be aware of that kind of thing. There are 35 of them. If the project is not going well, they can request an extension. But the plug can be pulled ultimately.

Questions & Answers

Q: Is there a format for the semi-annual report?

A: Yes. It should be on the website. We will get it up.

Q: When will we know the funding areas for next year?

A: I'm thinking late summer/early fall. It has been requested that we publish the FR notice around Thanksgiving so they can close in January, make funding decisions by March. This would be better than the current schedule.